

James R. Payton Jr, *Getting the Reformation Wrong: Correcting Some Misunderstandings*. IVP Academic, Downers Grove, IL: 2010.

In his very stimulating very engaging and very well informed and written study, Payton offers readers a faithful and reliable guide to the Reformation(s) Lutheran, Reformed, and Catholic.

His aim is to correct some potential misunderstandings about the Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and he achieves it by examining the roots of the Reformation in the Renaissance; conflict among the Reformers; what they meant by Sola Fide and Sola Scriptura; the Anabaptists and the Reformers; the Roman Reformation; Protestant Scholasticism; and then he concludes with a series of questions about the Reformation's success (or partial success). He decides, at the end of the day, that the Reformation is both triumph and tragedy.

Payton has a fine writing style. He's lucid and plain-spoken and a grand communicator. He clearly knows the subject quite well indeed. And, all in all, he gets the Reformation right.

All in all.

Nevertheless, his treatment of Zwingli is, in part, wrong. If Payton's desire is to correct misunderstandings of the Reformation in his valuable and interesting book, my desire in what follows is to encourage readers to consider more accurately a number of points where Payton simply doesn't get Zwingli right.

First, Payton's sources vis-à-vis Zwingli are quite inadequate and far too narrow. Payton doesn't – evidently – consult or even make use of the major contributions to Zwingli research by indispensable scholars such as Gottfried Locher, Oskar Farner, Diarmaid MacCulloch, Ulrich Gabler, or W.P. Stephens. No study of the Reformation can avoid these authorities. Especially when Zwingli is the subject. Yet none of these are included in the indices which can only mean that either Payton did not know them or did not use them. In either case, a serious mistake.

Second, Payton's belief that Luther was the source of the Reformation and Zwingli and the others merely adherents (though they did adapt Luther's insights for their own purposes) is wrong. Zwingli's own testimony is that he came to Reformation insights as early as 1515. Four years before Luther's 95 Theses and five before Luther's first major publications. Hence, the Reformation did not 'begin with

Luther' (p. 72). Luther's reformation began with Luther. Nor is it accurate to say that 'Zwingli, Bucer and Oecolampadius all turned to the Reformation movement as a genuine hope for the change long called for in Western Christendom. In so doing, they embraced the movement begun by Luther in 1517' (p. 99). Again, Zwingli had already been inwardly moved by the spirit of Reform in 1515 and Oecolampadius and Bucer, influenced by Erasmus (as had been Zwingli) were seeking Reform as well before they heard Luther's name or deed. This is where Locher's work in particular could have spared Payton a grave misunderstanding.

That isn't to say that Payton is in a minority. Many take the same line. But it's a wrong line and in a volume correcting misunderstandings of the Reformation, a necessary correction if ever there were one.

That said, Payton does an excellent job of describing *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide*. And he does an even better job dealing with the fascinating early history of the Anabaptists. No monolithic movement that, and Payton recognizes it and explains it beautifully. Indeed, not to be missed for any reason and certainly not to be skipped or skimmed are pages 166ff where Payton delineates the points of diversity characterizing the various Anabaptisms. This is, I would suggest, the very best part of the entire book.

When it comes to the Counter Reformation of the Catholic Church, Payton is fair and even handed. But he isn't very kindly disposed, it seems, to the decline of Reformation theology and practice during the period of the Protestant Scholastics.

So, Payton asks, was the Reformation as success? Yes and no. It accomplished great things and also unleashed vile beasts (like anti-trinitarianism). Did the Reformation triumph or was it a tragedy? Again, it was both. If it is to triumph today among its children, they must chose the higher ideals and goals of that movement and not follow the trajectory which leads to cold scholasticism.

Is Payton's volume a success? Yes and no. He accomplishes a great deal in it and he misunderstands a few things as well. But we all are subject to gaps in our knowledge and a need for further light. The Reformation brought (and brings) light to a dark world. Payton's volume brings light too.

I recommend you open Payton's volume. You'll discover far more light than darkness. And even what is dark is illuminating.

Jim West